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**CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS**

# SUCCESS STORY

## Communities Mobilize to Improve Health

### Project aids residents as they plan, carry out iodized salt campaign

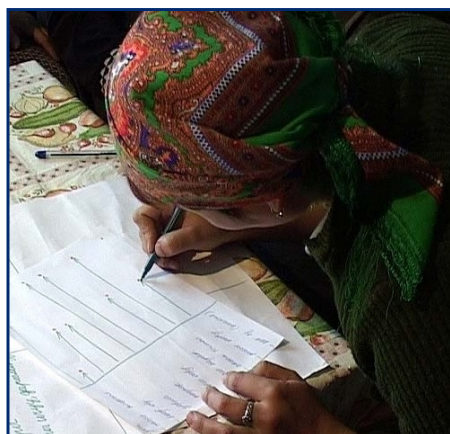


Photo: ZdravPlus

A primary health care worker helps a village in Issyk-Kul Province to identify and prioritize health issues they face, such as iodine deficiency.

***“People are now starting to fully understand that they need to do something themselves to stay healthy and not totally rely on medical workers,” said Kuban Ashimkanov, the leader of a village health committee in Ak-Suu District.***

With the collapse of its health system in 1990, Kyrgyzstan stopped providing its residents with preventive supplies of iodine. This has led to the growth of iodine deficiency and over 50 percent increase of related disorders such as goiter among children and teenagers.

A USAID health care project is collaborating with Kyrgyzstan’s Ministry of Health and other donors to empower rural communities to improve their health. The project has helped rural communities in Issyk-Kul Province identify and prioritize health issues, form 165 village health committees, and begin a series of health actions aimed at increasing individual and community responsibility for health.

The first health action focused on iodine deficiency, and led to increased awareness and an expanded availability of iodized salt in the province’s communities. In response, primary health care facility staff and village health committee representatives were trained on the importance of using iodized salt to prevent these diseases. Village health committees then began campaigns on iodized salt in their villages, educating the residents about the impact of iodized salt on their health and explaining how to store iodized salt properly to retain its medicinal qualities.

The committees are also routinely checking the iodine levels in household salt and the salt sold in local shops using quick and easy-to-use test kits. In addition, the majority of shops in cities and rural villages were equipped with test kits to check iodine content in the salt they buy from distributors and sell to consumers. The village health committees test salt in the shops monthly, so all villagers now have the right to ask shops to show that the salt they buy has been tested.

Increased community awareness and improved accountability of shopkeepers toward their clients have resulted in a dramatic increase in the percentage of salt being sold throughout the province that is iodized – from 62 percent at the beginning of the campaign to 85 percent six months later.

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